

NOTES FROM LONDON.

THE AMERICAN MAILS—PROOFS AND PRINTS—THE STREETS—PERSONAL.
FROM THE REGULAR CORRESPONDENT OF THE TRIBUNE.]

LONDON, August 23.

It is difficult to believe that the attempt of the British Post Office to improve the mail service to America has been very sincere. It is certain that it has been very weak. I know nothing of what has gone on in private. The published facts are enough to give rise to several grave questions. If there were or ever had been the least necessity to prove the badness of the existing service, there would be none in presence of an effort to reorganize it; an effort forced on a reluctant Department by the pressure of public opinion. Everybody knows that the Post Office close to the itself and hand foot by a contract eight years ago. That contract gave a monopoly—for all practical purposes—to three companies, the Cunard, the White Star and the Inman. The result has been that the mails have often been sent by slow ships while fast ships sailed the same day and arrived in New-York two, three, and four days before the mail-carrying ships. This was clearly true of the Saturday service which the Cunards took to themselves. The Department did not seem to care. When questions were asked in Parliament Mr. Fawcett's permanent assistants invariably put into his mouth the same stereotyped nonsense about a regular service being better than an irregular one—in other words, it was better the mails should always be slow than sometimes fast.

But the patience of the mercantile community has limits, and as the long contract drew to its close, the Post Office are its own words, and proclaimed its adoption of the American system, only in a modified and less efficient form. It asked for tenders. The three companies which form the existing ring put their heads together, as I judge, and resolved not to tender, expecting thus to drive the Department back into the old groove. The Department lent itself to this manœuvre by insisting that all ships should call at Queenstown so as practically excluded the North German Lloyd from the competition—or which more is a moment. The ring carried their point. The Department seemed only too willing to be bullied, and bullied it was; and announced its surrender in terms which imply a thorough belief in the long-suffering temper and enduring stupidity of the public. No change is to be made for the next twelve months.

This act must be defended, if it can be defended at all, on the plea of necessity. The sole excuse for the Department is its inability to get the mails carried on any other terms than the present. I believe it can be shown that no such inability exists. The present service is nominally a tri-weekly one. Mails are made up in London for America on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays. But the Tuesday mail is often overtaken by the Thursday mail. This very week, for example, the City of Montreal (Inman) sailed on Tuesday and the Britanic (White Star) on Thursday, and these same two ships have usually sailed on Tuesday and Thursday of the same week with the result that both reach New-York the same day. If the Tuesday boat is a good one, the Thursday is often slow, and if one post reaches New-York in time for it to be mailed the week following, the other does not. Not to go too much into detail, it may be said that the public is little if at all better accommodated by this tri-weekly service than it would be by a good bi-weekly service, on Thursdays and Saturdays. And my first point is that the material for such a service may be found outside the ring.

The North German Lloyd now dispatches weekly a fast ship from Southampton on Thursdays, reaching New-York, as a rule, on Friday. There is half the problem solved at once. At present they carry no regular mails. Of fast ships sailing from Liverpool, there are the City of Rome and Austral, of the Anchor Line, the Alaska and Arizona, of the Union Line, the America of the National Line. Has the Postmaster-General made proposals to them? Have they refused? If not, there is no excuse for resuming the old stage coach business. Here are ten of the fastest ships on the Atlantic. The three companies of the ring cannot among them muster five equally fast steamships. Five ships are adequate for a weekly service. The five of the North German Lloyd and the other five belonging to different companies could provide, and I believe would provide, a better mail service between England and New-York than the present. Why are they thrust aside, and what are the influences potent enough to secure the continuance of an inferior service? Perhaps some day answers to these and other puzzling questions may be forthcoming. At present I know of none.

My second point is simpler still. The companies which now carry the mails had, I believe, no intention of persisting in their opposition to the new scheme. It is not to be supposed that they would forfeit the prestige which attaches to the words "carrying the Royal and United States mails." You remember what happened when a similar change was made in New-York. The Cunard people took their usual lofty tone and said they would not submit to the new terms. One ship sailed without letters. Next week the Cunards collapsed and have carried mails on the terms of the American Post office ever since. Is there much reason to doubt that the same thing would have happened here? Is there any reason at all, in view of the facts above stated, and the feasibility of a good service without the help of either of the three companies constituting what I call the ring? We must bear the old delays, it appears, and manifold inconveniences of the old method for another year. But I venture to hope that the British Post office will then be made to do its duty.

Mr. Seymour Haden returns to the subject of "Proofs and Prints" with a fresh instalment of facts relating to the fraudulent manufacturers of both by certain print sellers. One of the ring has now turned Queen's evidence and writes: "What is the use of a stamp when the proofs are unlimited?" For if a member (of the association) desires to stamp 20,000 he is at liberty to do so, so long as they are "declared"; there is no limit; neither is there any limit as to quality; any rubbing so long as it is engraved on steel can be "stamped." Then he goes on to show the conditions of publication are disregarded, and sham "proofs" foisted on the public. "Example: 'The Allied Generals before Sebastopol,' published 1856; 3,025 proofs (!) declared to be stamped, the steel plate to be destroyed after the prints were taken." This plate was never destroyed but sold to the cheap market and is now in existence; and what was sold for 15 guineas can be bought now for a few shillings."

Example No. 2. "The Derby Day, published 1850; 1,025 artist's proofs (!) at 15 guineas, 1,000 proofs (!) before letters at 12 guineas, 1,000 lettered proofs (!) at 8 guineas, and 2,000 prints at 5 guineas, 'plate to be destroyed after the above are printed.' The plate was not destroyed, 'is still in existence, and continually printing when required!'"

And there are half a dozen more examples of a similar kind which I need not stop to cite. Mr. Haden forbears publishing what he calls the list of more recent engravings which he has and is ready to produce if challenged. He desires, he tells us, to prove that he is waging not against persons but against principles. But the matter can hardly stop here. Mr. Haden has gone too far or not far enough. He alleges explicitly that nine of these recent plates have been made to yield as many as 20,400 "proofs" at a charge to the public of £137,900, or \$689,500. The public which has been swindled to this extent with this degree of impudence will surely insist on knowing more about the offenders. If Mr. Seymour Haden will not publish the list, somebody else will.

As to the facts, there does not seem to be the least dispute. These charges have been made twice or thrice in print, twice at least by Mr. Haden himself. The only answer to them which anybody attempted was made by a firm of print sellers styling itself the Fine Art Association, and consisted mainly of irrelevant attacks on Mr. Haden. But neither the Fine Art Association nor anybody else has pretended to dispute the fact that print sellers have long been in the habit of announcing a limited number of "proofs," selling these at fancy prices on the strength of the limitation, and then printing and selling a practically unlimited number. If the public buys any more after this exposure, it will

least do so with its eyes open. Mr. Haden's advice in the matter is practical and sound: "Never buy one of these 'Association' proofs. Ask simply if what is being shown you is 'stamped,' and if it is, be sure that it is spurious and have nothing to do with it." And he proposes to publish his articles in a pamphlet, which it is tolerably safe to say that the print sellers will not keep on their counters.

To-day's papers contain reports of two or three cases of robbery by violence from the person in the streets of London in the daytime. They are becoming very frequent, and many occur of which nothing is said in print. I heard yesterday of one which is remarkable. A lady was walking in Park-lane at noon. She was quietly dressed, and did not carry in her hand the purse which is so often said to tempt the professional pickpocket to deacon-st. Park-lane answers to deacon-st. in Boston. A man sprang at the quietly dressed lady, tore off a gold chain from her neck, and ran. An omnibus crowded with passengers was passing. The men on top jumped down, gave chase, and caught the thief. It looks as if the criminal classes, like other classes, were suffering from the depression of business, and find themselves obliged to try desperate experiments. But perhaps it was not so desperate as it looked. The men on the passing omnibus were exceptionally enterprising. The rule in such cases appears to be not to interfere, the thief being supposed to have accomplices hard by who will make it unpleasant for anybody who is officious. It does happen, at any rate, that the thief more often than not gets away, and that violence is used to women in the presence of many people, who content themselves with calling for the police, engaged at the moment elsewhere.

A London journal announces that M. Victorien Sardou is writing a new piece for Mme. Sarah Bernhardt. The piece is written and has been read by the author to the actress, who considers her new play likely to prove the best she has ever played.

The Londoner is not to see Miss Ellen Terry act again this year. The doctors forbid it, but permit her to be present on the last evening of the Lyceum season, August 24, and "as an expression of gratitude for the sympathy which has been so widely manifested, how her acknowledgments to the audience." So say to-day's papers in their court circular style.

G. W. S.

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